{In Archive} Re: Fw: News - Stir It Up: Mining Texas aquifers for uranium has risks - San Antonio Current, 02/05/09

Brian Graves to: Bruce Kobelski 02/06/2009 09:52 AM

Cc: Jeff Jollie, Jill Dean, Marilyn Ginsberg, Robert-Eu Smith, Ray Leissner

From: Brian Graves/R6/USEPA/US
To: Bruce Kobelski/DC/USEPA/US@EPA,
Cc: Jeff Jollie/DC/USEPA/US@EPA, Jill Dean/DC/USEPA/US@EPA, Marilyn Ginsberg/DC/USEPA/US@EPA, Robert-Eu Smith/DC/USEPA/US@EPA, Ray Leissner/R6/USEPA/US@EPA

History: This message has been replied to.
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As I recall (and Ray verified) the Kingsville water supply is from the same aquifer but miles away (approx 4 - 5). Keep in mind that the mine is a sink since they pull more water out than they inject and there is a monitoring well ring between the mining and the water supply wells. The AOR is typically 1/4 mile outside the aquifer exemption boundary based on Guidance #34.

Brian

Bruce Kobelski/DC/USEPA/US

Bruce Kobelski/DC/USEPA/US
02/06/2009 09:33 AM

To: Brian Graves/R6/USEPA/US@EPA
cc: Jeff Jollie/DC/USEPA/US@EPA, Marilyn Ginsberg/DC/USEPA/US@EPA, Jill Dean/DC/USEPA/US@EPA, Robert-Eu Smith/DC/USEPA/US@EPA
Subject: Re: Fw: News - Stir It Up: Mining Texas aquifers for uranium has risks - San Antonio Current, 02/05/09

Thanks Brian, and in this reply I'm including the people here at HQ who are working on ISL or ISR as they now call it. The question I had, is that are the aquifers where they produce Uranium from the same aquifers where Kingsville gets its water? And do you have any idea of the typical AOR they use for these wells (I'd think they would be small because each well or wellfield doesn't stay active for a long period of time- am I correct?).

Good to see you all down in San Antonio.

Bruce J. Kobelski, Geologist
Underground Injection Control Program - USEPA
Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water
DWPD (4606M)
(202) 564-3888 or FAX (202) 564-3756

-----Brian Graves/R6/USEPA/US wrote: -----

To:
From: Brian Graves/R6/USEPA/US
Date: 02/06/2009 09:33AM

Subject: Fw: News - Stir It Up: Mining Texas aquifers for uranium has risks - San Antonio Current, 02/05/09

----- Forwarded by Brian Graves/R6/USEPA/US on 02/06/2009 08:23 AM -----

Larry Wright/R6/US EPA/US

02/06/2009 08:21 AM

To Philip Dellinger/R6/USEPA/US@EPA, Ray Leissner/R6/USEPA/US@EPA, Mike Frazier/R6/USEPA/US@EPA, William Hurlbut/R6/USEPA/US@EPA, Brian Graves/R6/USEPA/US@EPA, Jose Torres/R6/USEPA/US@EPA, Lisa Pham/R6/USEPA/US@EPA, Omar Martinez/R6/USEPA/US@EPA, Nancy Dorsey/R6/USEPA/US@EPA, Robert Todd/R6/USEPA/US@EPA

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Subje Fw: News - Stir It Up: Mining Texas aquifers for uranium
cthas risks - San Antonio Current, 02/05/09

----- Forwarded by Larry Wright/R6/USEPA/US on 02/06/2009 08:21 AM -----

Anthony Suttice/R6/US EPA/US

02/06/2009 07:43 AM

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News link:
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Stir It Up: Mining Texas aquifers for uranium has risks

San Antonio Current, 02/05/09
By Greg Harman

It’s better than open-pit mining, but the "death ore," as the Navajo know it all too well, poses significant challenges when mined even without tearing open wide the earth.

The process of "in-situ mining,” a method of extraction developed a few decades ago in which oxygen-rich water is pumped into uranium-rich formations contained in underground aquifers. It’s been happening at the Kingsville Dome outside Kingsville for 20 years, and soon it may come to Goliad County, as well.

The process essentially stirs the sedentary uranium molecules loose into the water column, where they can be pumped out and separated from the water and other minerals above ground before pumping the remaining water back underground — oftentimes well below the aquifer through deep waste disposal wells.

While several families live around the Uranium Resources, Inc., well field outside Kingsville, so far no radioactive pollution has reached nearby drinking wells, according to noted

hydrologist George Rice, an Edwards Aquifer Authority board member addressing a brown-bag lunch at the EAA on Wednesday.

“Contrary to what many of the residents believe, to date there is no evidence that any of these wells have been affected,” said Rice.

That doesn’t mean the practice is safe or well monitored, Rice said during his lunchtime lecture to a crowd of more than 50 packing the room. The lunch event, part of the Edwards Aquifer Philosophical Society’s brown-bag lecture series, typically brings “between 10 to 20” participants an EAA employee on my left tells me.

Representatives of CPS Energy, which has invested $276 million in a possible two-plant expansion of the South Texas Nuclear Project, were in the audience, as were a number of locals interested in making sure that expansion never occurs.

Interestingly, when the CPS Board of Directors made their initial $216 million investment for so-called site study and design last year, it was the testimony from South Texas residents concerned about uranium-mine pollution in their aquifers that gave some CPS employees — apparently immune to nuclear cost or disposal concerns — pause.

And while Rice, who has studied water quality issues around the Kingsville Dome, believes harm has not yet been done at this mine, he said the current regulatory environment is far from protective of people and the environment in the long term.

For starters, not a single in-situ uranium mine in Texas has been required to clean up mine waters to pre-mining levels as state law requires. Instead, one after another they've been exempted by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

“Clearly the concentration of contaminants are far higher after mining,” he told the audience. “I think there is good reason to be concerned about it in the future … Every time the mining company has gone to the TCEQ and asked them to relax the standards, they say, ‘Okay. We’ll do it.’”

Following the cleanup phase, the groundwater once more begins flowing in the preexisting direction, which in the case of Kingsville Dome is back in the direction of the city of Kingsville’s drinking water pumps.

Not only have TCEQ Commissioners consistently allowed mining companies to opt out of proper cleanups, current regulations only require the then-polluted groundwater plumes to be monitored for a period of six months.

Rice suggested that beneath the Kingsville Dome, where water has been tracked flowing everywhere from a few feet to several hundred feet per year, monitoring guidelines should require companies to keep watch over their polluted remains for at least five years. Any time an “excursion” of polluted water breaks beyond the ring of monitoring wells should add an automatic five years of additional monitoring, he said.

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"All the darkness in the world cannot extinguish the light of a single candle." - Maria Gautier

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